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The Contemplative Life

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CONTEMPLATION is a word which sounds badly out of key with the noises of our time. It savors, even to us religious folk, of hymn-book archaism. It suggests old Plato, the Pagan Orient, and the Catholic Middle Ages. A good many of us, it may be, are content to leave it to Athens, Buddha, and the monks.

We have no right to do this. The contemplative life is the God-conscious life. It is the life that knows its end and can rest in that knowledge. The Psalmist spoke of it: Be *still*, and *know* that I am God. We read of it in Hebrews: There remaineth a *rest* for the people of God.

John Calvin put it into the first question and answer of his Genevan Catechism. His question was fundamental: What is the chief end of man? And his answer was crystal-clear: To *know* God and *enjoy* Him forever. That is the eternal Sabbath which begins here: *Delight in the knowledge of God.* Modernity, by its neglect of God, has idolized the active life. John Dewey, lately deceased, was typical of this idolatry. He glorified process. He deified experiment. He championed evolution. His action lacked its reason. His reason lacked its worship. His worship lacked its object. Such action is not contemplative. It is blind. It is activism. The punsters teased him with their "learn to do by Deweying," and the jest fitted him.

Well before Dewey, the German Goethe had set the pace for the modern activism. He put his Faust to work translating the prologue to the Gospel

of St. John. That meant finding an equivalent for the Greek word *Logos*. Faust experimented with several possibilities. He tried *Thought*, and concluded it would not do. He tried *Word*, and rejected it as inadequate. He tried *Energy*, felt he was getting closer, but remained unsatisfied. Then he hit on it, and ushered in modernity: *In the beginning*, he wrote, *in the beginning was the Act*. The creature had taken over, and God was an exile from His world.

Such has been the modern temper. Service, humanitarianism, the second table of the law divorced from the first, evolution, process, change, experiment, motion — those are the keywords to the age. Carlyle, a disciple of Goethe and a rebel to Calvinist doctrine, applied it all to religion: "Whatsoever

religion," he said, "is not work, may go and dwell among the Brahmins . . . or where it will; with me it shall have no harbour."

The result of this neglect of the contemplative life has not been satisfying, even for moderns. There has been no *rest* and there has been no *enjoyment*. Ernest Dowson spoke of its endless activity:

*I cried for madder music and for
stronger wine,
But when the feast is finished and the
lamps expire . . .
I am desolate and sick of an old
passion,
Yea, hungry for the lips of my
desire.*

That old passion, were Dowson and others honest in analyzing it, is the

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The Contemplative Life — Continued

human passion for the knowledge of God. It is the longing of the creature for communion with his Creator.

The whole story of the sinner's pitiful flight from the grace of a satisfying communion with God is told in Francis Thompson's poem, *The Hound of Heaven*. There is no poise in such flight, no shelter, no harborage, no contentment. There is only the blind activism of the panic-stricken outlaw from God. You remember the lines:

*I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter. . . .*

And as his panic increases, the fleeing sinner hears his Lord: *Lo! naught contents thee, who content'st not Me.*

Mr. Eliot, the contemporary English poet with the Catholic temper, summarizes the modern predicament (Copyright Harcourt-Brace):

*Endless invention, endless experiment,
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word. . . .
Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?*

Action must spring from thought, from thought that is seated in worship, in worship that is worship of God.

The knowledge of God is proper to us as creatures, and it satisfies. That is the finest fruit of the contemplative life: to know and enjoy God. No one will care to ask what such enjoyment is for. It is enough for us. So far from being caught in the web of natural process, snared in the fatality of endless busyness, we can rest in that knowledge.

For man is a creature who can know. Animals cannot, though animals can be magnificently efficient. We people cannot for all our years fall as gracefully as a kitten at two weeks, or fly as well as a bird at its first attempt,

or build a house in the ground as competently as an ant. True, the ingenuity and skill with which men in our time have learned to do things is amazing. But such efficiency, skill, or power does not make a man a man.

We see that at once back there in Paradise. When God had done making the animals, we read this: *And the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto Adam to see what he would name them.* There we have it: a mind to know and to name. The capacity for conscious appreciation. The leisure, the spiritual freedom, to enjoy. Man, conscious reflector of the glory. *Homo sapiens*, man knowing, not quite submerged in *homo faber* man doing. *Homo ludens*, even, man as artist, man playing. The knowledge of God, which begins in the saving knowledge of Grace through faith, makes for rest and enjoyment. That is the finest fruit of the contemplative life.

Contemplation itself, of course, is not indolence, it is not idle. The saints work hard. Mary's effort at the feet was no easier than Martha's in the kitchen. Gethsemane is unique for its ardor. Jacob wrestled in prayer. Contemplation represents, not an escape from drudgery into entertainment, but the positive education of leisure. Some people are too lazy to engage in it, too bored to be still. It embarrasses them, the confrontation in solitude of self, and God, and destiny. Robert Louis Stevenson, perhaps with tongue in cheek, once wrote this of such persons: "There is a sort of dead-alive . . . people about who are scarcely conscious of living except in the exercise of some conventional occupation. . . . They have dwarfed and narrowed their soul by a life of all work, until here they are at forty, with a listless attention, a mind vacant of all material for amusement, and not one thought to rub against another while waiting for the train."

In its deeper levels this of Stevenson is a kind of boredom too, a boredom springing from neglect of the contemplative life. For boredom also is an earmark of life in our day. The poets have seen it and are good reporters. "Ennui, ennui, ennui," says Christopher Fry, in a recent drama, and he toasts the vanity of a purposeless life with a yawn. It had been Oscar Wilde's final dread. "The only horrible thing," he had said, "the only horrible thing in

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the world is ennui." It is horrible, of course. When we cannot find God, cannot find his world and his wonder. Or finding these, we can only use and exploit them; we cannot appreciate and enjoy them.

I thought of that when we crossed the Pacific, some of us, on military duty during World War II. There were five hundred of us crowded into the bowels of a hold in the ship. It was hot there. We travelled on or near the equator the better part of a month. Some of the men played cards all day every day. Finally we caught the first glimpse of our tropical island. It was there sublime in its splendid beauty. Those men landed . . . and began playing cards. I remembered some lines I had once read. This was one of them: "He is an uneducated man who is terrified by a process." This was another of Thompson's again: "'T is ye, 't is your estranged faces, That miss many-splendour'd thing." And that from Wordsworth also came to mind.

*The world is too much with us; Dying
and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our
powers:
Little we see in nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid
did boon!*

If the neglect of the contemplative life can lead to such an abuse of nature, it can lead also to an abuse of work. Few will deny that work in our age needs the sanctifying influence of contemplation. The harshness of secular exploitation must be taken out of it; the tenderness of religious purpose restored to it. Men have made their work their end. Their work is therefore their fate, and they are victimized by it. No wonder: work that is not free, that is not oriented to final purpose, that provides no knowledge of God — such work violates the spiritual nature of man who was born for this and that he should know and enjoy himself.

Ruskin in romantic longing for the old religious poise said as much in the last century. We take a lovely landscape, he said in effect, breath-taking in its beauty, and exploit it. We put the gleaming chimneys and ugly factories with their accompanying slums and smoke into it. Then when we see what we have done, we clear an acre or two, and decorate it as a public park. We take the freedom of individual expression out of the work on the conveyor belt and at the buffer wheel, and then, when we see what we have done to the artist in us, we hire a group of people to make art for us, and pile it up in museums. We take the positive leisure, the contemplative quality, the education out of our work, and then we tire ourselves on holidays and holydays laboring hard at our recreation. We try for a civilized house, with all the trimmings of a machine civilization — the garage, or garages, have of course supplanted the library — and then, when we have the house, radiant heat and all, we plan for a summer cottage where we can rough it for a while. There is some divorce of work and worship in all this too, and not enough consideration, not enough purpose.

Contemplation can sanctify work, provide its reason, give it purpose, harvest its fruits. I have seen it in a farmer. He was a good farmer, he enjoyed farming, but he was not a soil-grubbing, money-mongering farmer. For him the purpose of work was not to make money. It was not even to provide food, shelter, and clothing. Those were but the means. What he got from his work was the knowledge of God. After supper, evenings, he liked to saunter around his fields (that word *saunter*, incidentally, once meant going on a religious pilgrimage to St.

Terre). He did this not to satisfy his "acquisitive instinct," as if to say, "This is mine; I own this." Those evening jaunts of his were a kind of Sabbath journey in which he placed his effort on the altar, and gleaned its spiritual benefit. How different, such leisure, from the entertainment we moderns have provided as an escape from the drudgery of work.

The neglect of contemplation results also in the long run to an abuse of art. On this count, as I see it from my present vantage point, Puritanism has a burden on its conscience. It has sometimes ignored art, sometimes opposed it, and sometimes bent it to practical uses. Art is in this respect like religion: it does not want to be vindicated by its usefulness. It wants to be itself. The songs, the psalms of David, are fruit of the contemplative life. They express the enjoyment of the knowledge of God as He is revealed in the Word and the world. Such indispensable leisure is the condition always for the production and the enjoyment of art.

If we have not yet a literature, and an audience for the enjoyment of literature, comparable to that of the Catholics, or comparable to that of our kind in The Netherlands, this is to be ascribed in large part, perhaps, to the comparatively greater neglect of contemplation among us. We do not *enjoy* knowledge so much, and we *use* it more. And thought — in so far as Carlyle was right — thought without Reverence is barren.

The point in this connection is not of course that we should engage in the contemplative life for the sake of the arts. The point is rather that the presence or absence of the production and appreciation of them is an index to the quality of our enjoyment of God. For art is precisely the kind of thing which, disengaged from the processes of work, stands by disinterestedly harvesting its spiritual fruit. And the enjoyment of art, like the enjoyment of other kinds of knowledge, is at bottom not a practical but a contemplative affair. We shall sometime have to become concerned, as they in The Netherlands are already concerned, about what is there called the *manco* (it has almost become a technical term in Reformed circles there) or lack of a convincing Protestant-Christian literature.

We shall have to cultivate the contemplative in life, finally, if we are to

maintain our respect for education. We have sometimes dealt too cavalierly with knowledge. We have talked too much about knowledge *for*, and too little about knowledge *of*. If we see to it that our knowledge be knowledge of God, we need not be so greatly concerned about what it is for. Knowledge for effective citizenship, knowledge for power, knowledge for efficiency, knowledge for social usefulness, knowledge for economic competency, knowledge, even, for service — these have crept into our defenses of education also, and they are not warranted.

Sometimes at college we get students who are always chafing at their seats because they cannot see what all the Bible, philosophy, history, literature, language, and science are for. They want — sometimes, one guesses, by parental prompting — a fast course in business correspondence, double-entry ledger keeping, shop techniques, secretarial etiquette, and the like. Such an attitude, it should suffice to say now, is hard to relate to the first question and answer of John Calvin's Catechism. They have not fathomed the question, What is the end of man?, nor its answer, To know and enjoy. . . . They do not understand the Psalmist's injunction: Be still, and know. . . .

Our life is not a treadmill, but a journey, and we should be sometimes arriving. Essence of the contemplative life is delight in the knowledge of God. Because it begins, as I said, in the saving knowledge of faith, I am minded to reproduce here a poem which comes up out of a contemplative age, the eleventh century. It is the 410th number of the *Psalter Hymnal*:

*O Jesus, joy of loving hearts,
Thou fount of life, Thou light of men,
From fullest bliss, that earth imparts,
We turn unfilled to Thee again.*

*Thy truth unchanged has ever stood;
Thou savest those that on Thee call;
To them that seek Thee Thou art good,
To them that find Thee, all in all.*

*We taste Thee, O Thou living bread,
And long to feast upon Thee still;
We drink of Thee, the fountainhead,
And thirst our souls from Thee to fill.*

*Our restless spirits yearn for Thee,
Where'er our changeful lot is cast,
Glad that Thy gracious smile we see,
Blest, that our faith can hold Thee fast.*

—HENRY ZYLSTRA

Academic Freedom at Calvin

By HENRY STODOLSKY

EVERY one wants freedom. Business men want economic freedom. Citizens want political freedom. Believers want religious freedom. And teachers want academic freedom.

This is reasonable. Man has an essential dignity and a native claim to liberty. He was not meant to be a slave.

This the Christian knows and that is why he hates all tyranny. It is the reason for his opposition to political dictators, economic collectivisms, and coercive religious establishments. It also accounts for his resistance to monopolistic education and programs of thought control. It is the reason why he is a defender of academic freedom. He thinks all men should be free from arbitrary restraints, not only in government, business, and worship, but also in scholarship and learning.

Now Freedom is a Liberal shibboleth. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the Christian, who loves freedom, in at least apparent agreement on many practical issues with the secular liberals of the day. Like the latter he is apt to be an advocate of some form of democracy in government, of free though responsible enterprise in business, of liberty of conscience in religion, of freedom of expression in journalism, of civil liberties for men of every race and color in social polity, and of freedom of thought and inquiry in the schools. He is especially apt to be this if he is a Protestant and aware of the protestant tradition of liberty, criticism, and non-conformism. Like the Puritan of Macauley's *Essay on Milton* the typical protestant is a doughty champion of human freedoms, and thus in form at least a brother to the modern liberal.

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the Christian and the modern liberal are cut from the same cloth. Their agreements are only skin-deep. Both want freedom, but their definitions of freedom are different, and the difference is reflected in the character of their practical proposals. It is my purpose to indicate this by discussing one of the many freedoms both are

concerned to preserve — academic freedom in the schools.

* * *

THE question of academic freedom is currently a very live issue in American university circles. Educators are discussing it avidly. Many of them feel that under the pressures of the times this freedom is being lost or seriously curtailed. The forces of reaction, they think, are hampering free inquiry and action. As evidence they cite the dismissal of a number of faculty members from the staff of the University of Washington for communist party affiliation; they cite the action taken by the trustees of the University of California requiring a loyalty oath of staff members; they cite the rule recently invoked at Michigan State College forbidding faculty members to take active part in party politics; and they cite the insistence of Mr. Buckley in his popular book that the chair of Economics at Yale be returned to the defenders of the Capitalistic System.

All this, it is said, reveals that professors in our colleges are no longer free, or no longer as free as they ought to be. Whether this is actually so depends, of course, upon what one understands by academic freedom, and I propose to make an elementary analysis of that concept, not merely in order to estimate the weight and bearing of the evidence just cited, but also and primarily to determine whether there is, or ought to be, such a thing as academic freedom at Calvin College.

* * *

THE fact that it is *academic* freedom we are considering requires us to recall what an academic institution is concerned to do. It is necessary to observe what the specific areas are in which academic freedom is properly exercised.

It appears that these areas are two in number. There are at least two things that an academic institution is concerned to do. It is concerned to dis-

close truth, and it is concerned to publish truth. A college must be engaged in research, and it must teach. It must both investigate and disseminate.

These two functions are sometimes separated. The one is then assigned to the University and the other to the College. Expediency seems to require this. In reality, however, the two functions belong together, and they ought to be kept in the closest possible contact. A college such as our own, for example, even though it offers no advanced degrees and therefore cannot strictly be called a university, must perform the university function of research as well as the college function of teaching. If Christian teaching is to be real there must be Christian scholarship beforehand. And if both are to be real there must be freedom — academic freedom: freedom of inquiry for the scholar and freedom of expression for the teacher.

But what are we to understand by *Freedom*?

* * *

THERE is in the notion of Freedom both a negative and a positive element. In current usage the negative element predominates and sometimes this negativity is erroneously regarded as exhausting the whole meaning of the term. This is a serious mistake. It remains true, however, that the negative freedom does have an inalienable negative aspect. In this aspect freedom means *Freedom From*. It means Immunity. It means immunity or exemption from something. It connotes absence of restraint, bondage, or subjection. It means to be loose from restrictions.

This negativity, far from being a negligible element in freedom, is the very essence of perfect or absolute freedom, such as is enjoyed by God. God is completely free. He is bound to nothing external to himself. He is not in bondage to nothing. "His freedom consists in a supreme independence of all things apart from himself, a complete immunity from subjection or necessity of any kind, except the essential necessity of knowing and loving

himself in an eternal unchanging act that is identical with his nature" (David O'Connell).

Now man is created in the image of God, and because he bears the divine image he too has freedom, even freedom in the negative sense of Independence. But because he is *created*, his freedom is a creaturely freedom, his independence is a creaturely independence. The adjective "creaturely" is important. It modifies man's freedom. It means that human freedom can never be described simply as exemption from "undue" restraint.

This implies, of course, that there are "due" restraints upon him. They are upon him precisely because he is a creature and thus subject to God, to God's laws, and to all the ordinances of God. But it also implies that he is entitled to throw off "undue" restraints. He is entitled to do this precisely because he bears the image of God. Being superior to nature and on a plane with his fellows he may refuse to be victimized by the one or enslaved by the other.

It is this nice balance between liberty and restraint, freedom and subjection, that is the essence of the Christian conception of Liberty, and the very basis of genuine Democracy.

* * *

BECAUSE there is a nice and delicate balance here, it has not always been preserved. To many, freedom under law, liberty under restraint, independence within the framework of an ultimate dependence, high dignity while in creaturely subjection, has seemed grossly contradictory and quite intolerable.

The first to think it intolerable was Lucifer and by putting the thought into operation he became the Devil. The next to think so was Adam, and his acting on the principle was his Fall. He wished to be like God. In this context that means: he wished to be free, unqualifiedly free, exempt from any and all restrictions except those imposed by his own nature.

To the sinner, fallen in Adam, this desire has ever since seemed somehow right. Freedom, he thinks, is incompatible with commitment. Of course the view cannot be consistently maintained except on the basis of a radical

atheism. But very few men have gone so far as to deny that God exists; most men have simply fenced him in. To save his freedom man has restricted God; he has shorn him of his comprehensive and unqualified Lordship. The sinner, untouched by grace, puts God either in an uninfluential and non-determinative spectator role, as in Deism; or identifies him with the human spirit itself, as in Pantheism; or exempts from his rule and sovereignty some particular part of the human soul, as in Rationalism, where the intellect is declared autonomous, and religion and science, faith and reason, piety and learning, love and logic, Christianity and education, are thought incapable of combination.

* * *

IT is this latter view that comes to expression in the liberal tradition of modernity, a tradition which has its roots in renaissance humanism and its chief expression in secularistic scientism. It is this view that dominates contemporary discussions of academic freedom, and it is the bond of agreement even between disputants. What the so-called liberals are all agreed on is that academic freedom is freedom *from* — freedom from the apriori, freedom from assumptions, freedom from commitment, freedom from the dictation of religious faith, freedom from a sacred book, freedom from a dogmatic creed.

That they are generally agreed on this could be amply evidenced from the literature. Practical illustration of it is afforded by the events that transpired at the University of Washington. The president of that institution dismissed a number of prominent professors on the ground that they had Communist Party affiliations. When the news of the dismissals reached the campuses of the land, a great hue and cry went up. The action of the president was loudly denounced as a violation of academic freedom. A university, it was maintained, is a place where every voice must be heard. Education as such is uncommitted to any specific theory or position. It must remain free of entanglements with any economic, social, or religious view, and hospitable to all. The truth is at no point finally made out. To suppose that it were would be to hamper and

restrict free critical inquiry at precisely that point. One must maintain the open, indeterminate mind, and by that token keep a completely open door at College and University. Academic freedom demands this.

The president had to reply to his detractors, and it is interesting to note that though he differed from them in practice, he agreed with them in theory. "True," he said in effect, "a free scholar is an uncommitted scholar, a free school is one that owns no basic faith, a good teacher is one that has an open and undetermined mind on all fundamental questions. The great enemy of freedom is Faith, Dogma, Conviction, Commitment. That is why I fired the Communists. They are dogmatists, they are doctrinaire, and there is no room for such in a democratic institution."

That the president and his critics differ in practical policy is at this juncture of little concern. What is of concern is that they share a common assumption and adhere to a common philosophy of freedom. Both parties would be critical of the educational effort carried on at Calvin. Were they to measure Calvin against their definition they would be able to find on all the campus not a wisp of academic freedom. What they would find is scholars and teachers building on a Book, men and women pursuing their inquiries in complete reliance on an authoritative Word taken as the absolute rule of knowledge and practice, truth and life. And they would repudiate the whole thing.

* * *

WELL then, that raises the whole question once more: Is there academic freedom at Calvin College? The answer to that question is twofold.

At the level on which the so-called liberal asks it, the answer is, Yes. There is not at Calvin that spurious thing which he calls freedom, but there is genuine freedom, human freedom. The liberal notion of freedom is negative; it is freedom from. At Calvin it is positive; it is freedom for. For the secularist freedom is an end. For the Calvinist it is a means. The Calvinist wants freedom, but he wants it in order to attain a further goal. He wants it in order to attain his true place: under God who made him and above the nature he is called upon to rule.

Academic Freedom — Continued

It is clear to us at Calvin that we are creatures and therefore not wholly sovereign. We know that we do not and cannot exist in ultimate independence. We know that from the nature of the case we and all men have a master, and that by an inviolable law of our being we all serve one, the true one or a false one. We know, therefore, that the question of freedom is never rightly put until one asks: What Lord do you acknowledge? To what do you tie yourself? To whom or what are you basically and finally committed? And we know that there are only three possibilities here: Nature, Man, and God.

We at Calvin choose God, or are chosen by him, and we try to live and think by his word. We bow at this one point and therefore are free at every other — free precisely there and completely there where a human being may and can be free — free of nature and on an equality with men. That is why we are deaf to communism; we have no ear for economic determinism. That is why we resist to the death all tyranny; having given our allegiance to the King of Kings we count no man our master — neither the man on horse back, nor the man in purple, nor the man in the mitred cap. We stand in awe neither of the man in the Cadillac nor of the man in overalls. We are not intimidated by academic nonsense, and we don't bow before the sacred cow of science. We are free men. And we are free men because we have our anchor in the bedrock of the universe.

The secularist, on the other hand, who prates of a human freedom proper only to God, is bound to lose both God and every freedom proper to a creature. On the level of nature he will become the victim of those mechanical monsters — bomb, plane, cannon — that he has the ingenuity to create but not the wit to control. And on the level of society he will fall before a succession of Mussolinis, Hitlers, and Stalins. Having no foot in heaven he has no power to resist the strong men of the earth.

The liberal doesn't want this slavery, of course. He hates communism, he hates tyranny, he hates the bondage of machines and gadgets. He hates them almost as much as he hates the sovereign God of Calvinism. He wants to be free of them all. But, of course, he cannot. He has to make a choice of

masters. He has made his choice, and by it he shall be judged.

* * *

IF the question be asked then: Is there academic freedom at Calvin?, the answer to the secularist in the liberal tradition is, Yes — freedom from the subjectivism, the relativism, the nihilism of the age; freedom from the frustrations, the anxieties, the pessimisms of the times; freedom from the brute uncontrolled "reality" that the unbelieving scholar has imaginatively projected and which, on his own showing, may turn at any moment and engulf him. There is freedom at Calvin: the freedom that comes from walking in The Way.

If, however, the question is asked on another level, by those who stand with us in the same commitment, the answer cannot be quite the same. If it be asked: Is there, within the framework of the Scripture and the Creeds, freedom of inquiry and expression at Calvin?, the answer is, "Yes, but there could be more."

No doubt such an answer can always be given. There is no perfection in this world. There are and always will be accidental and arbitrary restrictions on liberty, even in the best societies. But this is no excuse for their presence. Despite all their actuality, arbitrary restrictions remain undesirable, and they are most undesirable in a Christian community. Here freedom is held as a sacred possession. Here liberty is strictly inviolable. This means that if anywhere, then at Calvin, there should be academic freedom, freedom from extraneous and non-academic restraints.

Let no one misunderstand. There must be restraint. There must be the quite academic restraint of the truth; not the restraint of some merely abstract, amorphous, undefined truth always in process, but the restraint of the truth authoritatively disclosed in Scripture and freely acknowledged in the creeds. By this the scholars and teachers at Calvin are bound. And they are bound by another thing. They are bound by the law of Love, by the obligation to walk humbly with their God and considerately and self-sacrificially with their fellows. But by nothing else are they bound, and with no other yoke should they be burdened.

They must not be compelled to establish anyone in his private conceits, nor

to further the ambitions of any party. They must be free, within the framework of a shared commitment, to come to a conclusion that contravenes the majority opinion, or perchance the opinion of an articulate and militant minority. They must be at liberty to explore new areas of truth, and to do so in their own responsible way. And they must have the same liberty to hold at arm's length new ways of thought however impatiently presented for adoption.

They should be given rein. If it turns out that any one of them has wandered off or become lost, let him be reoriented, or if he be perverse, cut loose. But they should not have men peering on their necks and constantly peering over their shoulders. They can't work that way. What they need is trust. They must be free to attack knotty and complex problems in the knowledge that they have the confidence of the Church, and they must have the freedom to express and expose to public criticism tentative ideas that may require revision or abandonment.

They also need freedom from the weight of custom and from the tyranny of venerable names. What they need, too, is freedom from fear and reprisals. And what they need most of all is freedom from the sting of unfairly formed prejudice, freedom from name-calling, and freedom from silent but enervating suspicion.

We have all together undertaken a great and delicate task. We have undertaken to construe the world in the categories of eternity. It is a terrifically responsible task. To discharge it we need the utmost degree of consecration and competence. Doubtless we need watchfulness too, but it must be the watchfulness of the friend who cares. We need the watchfulness of the brother that is quick to help. What we need is wisdom, loyalty, and charity. And this from all sides.

It will be agreed, I think, that of this we have not had enough. It is only in the measure that we have it that the scholars and teachers at Calvin will be able to perform their demanding tasks. They need this climate, this room, this freedom. They need it in order to do their duty, to inquire into and articulate the whole body of Christian truth, to trace out according to their lights all its implications. They need this freedom for the truth's sake to which they are committed.

Is Pilgrim's Progress Still Readable?

By JOHN TIMMERMAN

DURING the seventeenth century, *Pilgrim's Progress* was on the rude shelf of many a rough cabin. The demand, even in the wilderness, occasioned an unprecedented American reprinting three years after its publication in England in 1678. It did not serve as decor to impress the clergyman, but was so widely read that Bunyan could truthfully say that the colonists regarded it with a "much loving countenance." Together with the Bible, Foxe's grim, picturesque *Book of Martyrs*, and a few books of sermons, it formed the core of Puritan reading. I doubt whether there are as many copies in Boston homes today. When the contemporary Bostonian emerges from his nap under a curtain of Sunday papers, he turns to television. Who now reads the book? The popular classic has become merely an unread conversational counter.

The reasons for its neglect are clear. A high school student in a book report dismissed the book as irrelevant for the young because "*Pilgrim's Progress* is more for grownups because it's all about sin and living righteously." The book's progress is away from the world; it is meditative and individualistic. The Holy War it describes is less interesting than a prosperous booth in Vanity Fair. We like to succeed here, and to develop our religious life communally through endless conferences. Every age has its characteristic religious media; and we prefer speeches to books. Whether it be a better way is irrelevant here, but it does explain in part the neglect of the great books our fathers loved. Furthermore, the book is a three hundred year old classic and as such a little gnarled and quaint in idiom. And Christian with his strange speech, odd clothes, and hurried passage is, at first, a bit unappealing. Thus *Pilgrim's Progress* stands proudly in a hundred lists of the hundred best books accumulating merely dust and prestige. And that is a pity, for so I think.

Every schoolboy knows it is a great book. Practically nobody knows that it comes in two parts, and that the

greatness belongs primarily to Part I, which is the journey of Christian. The sequel, which concerns the travels of Christiana, suffers the fate of most sequels — less creative fire, less charm, something spun out. The following comments apply to Part I, the book as commonly known.

That John Bunyan wrote it is amazing though understandable. Bunyan was an uneducated boor from the lowest ranks with a minimum of schooling. After a series of shattering mental experiences, described with moving eloquence in *Grace Abounding*, he found peace from the terrifying eruption of fears and foul thoughts, and entered the Baptist ministry. His seminary was the Bible, his artistic competence was untaught genius. Yet when one considers the white heat of personal experience and the saturation in the rich imagery and rhythms of the King James Bible, the book is understandable.

Pilgrim's Progress is the inevitable flowering of *Grace Abounding*. Bunyan imaginatively went through the terrors of the madhouse; consequently, the battle with Apollyon, the struggle with Giant Despair, and the ineffable peace of salvation are concretely real in his masterpiece. In the leisure of his mild and friendly imprisonment, he meditated and formed his masterly allegory.

Like all great books it has levels of enjoyment and meaning. There is the level of action and plot. In plot the book is sensational, full of stir and tumult, battle and smoke, beatings, chase and escape. Little-Faith is attacked by three sturdy foes. He is "white as Clout."

With that, Guilt with a great Club that was in his hand, strook Little-Faith on the head, and with that blow fell'd him flat to the ground, where he lay bleeding as one that would bleed to death.

In action it has the punch of a shilling shocker.

Distinguished characterization is essential to fiction. After the plot is forgotten the great characters echo in the mind. Mere action should not dwarf

the plot as in the average detective story. Great fiction adds a dimension to our friendships. Certainly, Christian, Faithful, Evangelist, and the Giant Despair are convincing and unforgettable. But many of the minor characters are shrewdly, even bitingly portrayed. The jury in Vanity Fair has such redoubtable characters as Mr. Live-loose, Mr. Heady, and Mr. Money-love. Lord Fairspeech, Mr. Two-tongues, and Mr. Facing-both-ways are known to us all. And we have heard of Mr. Gripe-man, a school-master, in Love-gain, a market town. The characters are inherently interesting as well as typical, and often amusingly British.

Good characters rise from a living social context and live on a real terrain. Bunyan abounds in faithful local color of the English country-side. Rural England becomes the setting of cosmic drama. When Christian stumbles through the valley of the Shadow of Death, he is struggling through an English bog. Vanity Fair is any English market. The Giant Despair is a typical English landlord growling out English custom:

You have this night trespassed on me, trampling on and lying on my grounds, and therefore you must go along with me.

The imagery of Scripture fuses with that of the English country-side in the final scenes of the book.

The prose of the book has always been praised. Its dialog may occasionally appear distressingly didactic, but granted the overwhelming conviction underlying the book, its fitness can be argued. The language is homespun yet colorful, suggestive yet precise. It is purified common speech, often redolent of the majestic rhythms of the Bible. It is lively, not prim. The pilgrims are put into a dark dungeon "nasty and stinking." Temporary Christians are described as "hot for Heaven, so long as the flames of Hell are about their ears." It is full of quotable sayings.

If a man would live well, let him fetch his last day to him, and make it always his company keeper. It rises to memorable beauty in the ecstatic descriptions of Heaven, "for in

Pilgrim's Progress — Continued

this Land the shining Ones commonly walked, because it was upon the Borders of Heaven."

But the greatest reach of the book lies in its meaning. It is our best allegory because of the precise relation between symbol and idea, sense and story. Vanity Fair, Doubting Castle, the Slough of Despond, the Valley of Humiliation are recognizable states on the spiritual journey. The symbolism is never baffling or chaotic. It is all picture, and it is all meaning.

It is here that Bunyan suggests the nature of Christian art. The book could so easily have become a dreary tract; the story could have been moralized to death. It escapes that fate because of the successful fusion of artist

and Christian. In Bunyan the Christian emotions and ideas spontaneously express themselves in appropriate form. Bunyan's story grew out of his experience; it was intensely real to him. It was not manufactured, tailored, synthetically made to serve an external end. The deeply felt experience poured into a pattern congenial to it. In saying this I realize all the artistic problems Bunyan escaped by living where and when he did, but his art does seem to me to suggest the fusion a contemporary Christian novelist will have to achieve.

Pilgrim's Progress is a classic of universal Christian experience. Christians are all way-farers and burden-bearers; we must all run the same haz-

ard to the City of God. Bunyan knew sin and despair, almost to madness; he knew what it meant to be lifted from the miry clay, and the battering struggle to God's other kingdom. He put it all down in a book Christians should read.

Modern man is in search of a father and a home. Man is adrift on a slender spar in an infinite sea. Looking for a light, he sees a dark sky and greater waves. Therefore he writes books with revealing titles: *To the Lighthouse Look Homeward Angel*, *Ulysses*, and *The World's Illusion*. Ulysses will find no lighthouse, and looking homeward, the angel will find only the loss of illusion of childhood. We believe that the Christian was on the only way, that his way alone leads home. Why should we so neglect his book?

Biblical Eschatology Illustrated

By JAMES DAANE

THE central criticism of this series has been directed against the traditional delimitation of the time and content of Eschatology to the second coming of Christ. This unwarranted delimitation has caused us to neglect the real, hard core of realized eschatology present in the Cross and Resurrection, and this in turn has caused us to fail to discern the eschatological fibres which are interwoven into the very structure of our Christian doctrine.

This criticism was launched on the basis of the thesis that what the Bible designates as the "last things" have had their essential, although not complete, fulfillment at the time of the first coming. In brief, this means that what the Bible signifies by End, namely, the end of the reign of sin, has been achieved at the Cross. This End, thus defined, is so real that the whole New Testament era is determined by it, Christian doctrine cannot be fully understood without reference to it, and all interest in the calendar-date end of the world not infused with it must be judged to be mere non-Christian curiosity.

The realized eschatology of the first coming also means that a new and real Endlessness emerged in the Resurrection. This means, in brief, that there is now within the created universe an existing reality which is characterized

by eternality or Endlessness, namely a reality that is endless because it cannot come again under the dominion of sin. This quality of Endlessness is real, and is the characteristic feature of that whole redemptive structure called the Kingdom of God. This Endlessness is as real as regeneration is real. It is as real as the new man in Christ is real; as real as God's new creation, the Church. Its reality constitutes the blessed character of the Resurrection, the measure of biblical immortality over bare endless duration.

The whole complex of Truth and Order known as the Kingdom of God rests, both as regards its existence and its nature, upon the foundation of the realized eschatology of the first coming. It is the reality of the End and the Endless as given in the Cross and Resurrection which constitutes 1. the very reality and existence of the Kingdom of God in the world, 2. the very nature of the Kingdom of God as that which both is and is coming, 3. and the very ground for the possibility of the ultimate fulfillment of this Kingdom at the second coming. Unless this whole complex of Truth and Order, the Kingdom of God, is understood from the vantage point of the foundation of real eschatology laid at the first coming of Christ, Premillennialists will

continue to look to the future for a millennial reign of the Lordship of Christ and will continue to conceive of it in an earthly and materialistic manner. And A-millennialists, while continuing to insist upon the present Lordship of Christ, will nonetheless, because they too look to the future for the beginning of the realization of eschatology strictly so called — without which the Lordship of Christ has no foundation — stand with an a-millennial doctrine in their hands almost void of content and incapable of intelligible articulation.

* * *

In this concluding article I shall attempt to show that the eschatologically realized End and Endless of the Cross and Resurrection are real elements that have gone into the composition of our Christian doctrines. Space demands that the attempt be limited to the two doctrines of Eternal Life and of the Holy Spirit — although suggestive light may be thrown on others. Obviously the treatment must be illustrative rather than exhaustive.

Eternal Life and Eschatology

ACCORDING to the New Testament, the believer in this world possesses eternal life not as a bare claim but as an actual possession. In this li-

"which is nothing but a constant death" eternal, endless life is a reality that truly exists.

Mere endless duration is no more the characteristic feature of the believer's eternal life than it is the special feature of the Endless given in the Resurrection. The special character of this life with which Christ emerges in the Resurrection, is *power and glory*. The power and the glory of this life consist in the fact that it cannot again be brought under the dominion of sin's rule. Christ, therefore, lives forever. He died once, but he dies no more. This same power and glory constitute the special feature of the believer's eternal life. His eternal life cannot again be impregnated by sin and terminated by death. Eternal life is characterized by a power that cannot again be defeated by the now broken power of sin. This is its peculiar glory.

The believer possesses this life, or more correctly, lives this life by virtue of his regeneration. What is regeneration? It is a species of the Resurrection. Regeneration is effected by the extension or application of the power of the Resurrection to the individual — and ultimately, as our Lord teaches, to all things (Matt. 19:28). The believer's eternal life, therefore, given him in his regeneration also possesses these qualities of power and glory. Just as the peculiar glory of Resurrection life is that infused power which renders impossible a re-invasion by sin and a re-establishment of sin's dominion, just so the glory of the believer's eternal life consists in the fact that it cannot be re-invaded by sin and re-subjected to the reign of sin. Because of his regeneration — participation in the Resurrection — the believer lives, and yet not he, but Christ liveth in him, and the life the believer now lives in the flesh he lives by the power of the Son of God.

Peter pointed to this power and glory which characterizes eternal life when he declared that we are "begotten again by an incorruptible seed." (I Peter 1:23). This Resurrection-regenerated-eternal life is *not able* to be corrupted. It is infused with a power that makes an invasion by sin impossible. John underscored the same truth when he wrote, "Whosoever is begotten of God *doeth no sin*, because his seed abideth in him; and he *cannot sin*, because he is *begotten of God*." Once the believer was a sinner, and could only sin. Now he is begotten of God and he "doeth

no sin," and "cannot sin." If this be true, and so the Bible itself states, then with respect to the sinner-who-has become-believer something indeed has come to a real End, and something Endless has come into real existence. The End, as the end of sin's dominion, and the Endless, as a life which cannot be dominated by sin, correspond precisely to the End given in the Cross, and the Endless given in the Resurrection.

This interconnection between resurrection, regeneration, and eternal life with their inherent qualities of power and glory as defined above, has not indeed been denied by Reformed thought. Yet it has enjoyed but little emphasis. The treatment it has usually received has tended to suggest that this life of power and glory is as yet not real, but will become so, and for the first time, at the time of the second coming. Against the tendency to under-emphasize this realized eschatology, it must be stressed that there has been an actual realization of the eschatological End and Endless which is real in Christ, real in the nature of the new creature in Christ, and real in His Body which is the Church, God's new creation. This is not to deny that the eschatological End and Endless will be completely fulfilled only at the second coming, but it is to insist that only that can be filled full which is *real*. That which is perfected at the second coming must have real existence at the first coming; nothing new takes place at the second coming except that which is essentially made new at the first coming, just as nothing is brought to an end at the second coming which is not brought to an essential end at the first coming. Stated in personal terms: To him that hath shall be given.

In biblical thought, power and glory are related to the idea of lordship (Kingdom). In the Resurrection, Christ arises as the Lord. His lordship consists in his power over sin. He has dominion over sin, but sin has no dominion over him. This Lordship constitutes the possibility and the glory of his Kingdom.

Now the believer too by virtue of his possession of eternal life possesses lordship. He is a king, as well as a prophet and a priest. The special character of this lordship, which distinguishes the believer from the sinner, is its triumph over sin. The believer expresses his lordship by a life of faith through which he has his victory over the

world, by a profound victory over sin expressed in the repudiation of sin through sincere repentance and sorrow, by his fighting against sin and the devil in this life with a "free and good conscience" (Lord's Day XII), and finally by his ability to perform what are essentially good works. The Reformed teaching, expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism, that to be a "Christian" means to participate in Christ's lordship as well as in the prophetic and priestly offices, has been but little consciously stressed or enjoyed by Reformed Christians. Until this lordship of the believer is seen as an aspect of eternal life as eschatologically realized through the Cross and Resurrection, the doctrine of the believer's lordship will never be developed.

Unless this writer is mistaken it is also true that the eschatological aspect of Baptism as a baptism into Christ's death (Rom. 6:3) and the related doctrines of the Christian's freedom from the law and of the Christian's liberty in Christ, have also been but little stressed. Yet we shall never adequately understand the Pauline characterizations of the believer as one who is "free from sin" (6:18, 22), "dead to sin" (6:11), as one over whom sin shall not have dominion (6:14), as "dead to the law" (7:4), as one who is "discharged from the law, having died to that wherein we were held" (7:6) except on the basis of realized eschatology. If we reduce these characterizations to things that the believer, in the first instance, ought to achieve, we slip into the field of mere moralism. It is only when we understand these words of Paul as something which now essentially characterizes the believer's life because of the grace of God and the work of Christ in his Cross and Resurrection, that we remain within the field of salvation by grace and avoid an unbiblical legalism and moralism. So soon as we posit the essential reality of these inherent qualities of eternal life, we have returned to the realized eschatology of the first coming.

Only by recognizing the eschatological features of eternal life can we properly identify the bearer of eternal life. The New Testament Christian is an eschatological person. If he is to be properly identified, then he must be identified as a person whose sinful life has come to an essential end at the Cross, and as one who now lives or bears the endless life, unimpregnable by sin, the life of the Resurrection.

Biblical Eschatology — Continued

When he is identified in these terms he is not, as Barth contends, just as much saint as sinner and vice versa, but he is essentially saint. This is evident from the manner of Paul's address to the members of the Christian churches. It is also evident from the manner in which Paul refers to his continued sinning: "it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom. 7:17).

In this eschatological feature of the bearer of eternal life lies the basis for the Calvinistic doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. "Once a Christian, always a Christian" is true precisely because the new Resurrection-regenerated life of the Christian cannot be impregnated by sin. No allurements of sin, no doubt of faith, no pressure of hateful circumstances, no power of things present or things to come, no power of sin, death, or hell, can destroy this life. His perseverance is assured because the broken power of sin cannot successfully corrupt it and bring it to an end, for that power of sin has seen its own end in the Cross!

The above is not at all intended to imply that we must subscribe to the doctrines of Holiness or Antinomianism. With such we must have no commerce. But it is intended to emphasize that the idea of "kingdom, power, and glory" is an essential ingredient of that life which has its real beginning in the Resurrection, a beginning made possible by the consideration that the Cross is a real End of the dominion of sin.

The Holy Spirit and Eschatology

As every student of theology knows, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the doctrine of Eschatology are both but thinly developed. Because of this many ministers preach on eschatology but rarely. How many of us ministers have ever preached a sermon on the text, "but now once at the end of the ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26)? On account of the same lack of development, many ministers experience that the compulsory annual Pentecostal sermon is one of the most difficult to make.

It appears, however, that there is no great awareness that neither of the above-mentioned undeveloped doctrines can be developed without the other. The history of theology will demon-

strate that when one experiences an enriching development, the other will also enjoy a corresponding and simultaneous enrichment. The reason these two doctrines have and will run a parallel history of poverty and enrichment is that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is itself an eschatological doctrine.

Pentecost is an eschatological event. Like the Crucifixion, it happened at the "end of the ages." It is an event of the "last days" and is, therefore, one of the "last things."

When Peter answered the charge that Pentecost was due to drunkenness, he quoted the prophet Joel: "This is that which hath been spoken through the prophet Joel: And it shall be in the last days, saith God, I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh. And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy . . . And it shall be, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:16, 17, 21).

These words state very clearly that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is an event of the "last days." When it did in fact take place, it reveals that the days in which it takes place are the "last days." The event of Pentecost tells the time on the clock of history. The coming of the Spirit is itself a sign of the End and of the nearness of the End.

The difficulty that troubles almost every minister in making his annual Pentecostal sermons can be indicated by the question, What is true after Pentecost that was not true before Pentecost? It is not true that now for the first time the Spirit dwells in the hearts of God's people. This was also true before Pentecost. What then is new after Pentecost?

The question can perhaps best be approached by looking at the signs that indicated the reality of this event. Signs are demonstrations of power. The most extraordinary and significant signs were not the sound as of a rushing wind, the appearance of fire, nor the fact that the Apostles suddenly were able to speak more than one language. These were signs, but signs of what? These are signs that the Holy Spirit in these last days has constituted a Church by his indwelling, whose nature therefore constitutes it a witness of the gospel to all flesh and all nations. This is the new thing: a Spirit-filled Church whose nature therefore is to release the gospel from its Jewish confines and ef-

fect its entrance upon the world stage. Thus the outpouring of the Spirit, the constitution of the Church, the proclamation of the gospel to all nations constitute those "last things" which happen in the "last times" and as such are each one, and all together, a sign of the End and a sign of its nearness. It is this event, in conjunction with the Cross and Resurrection, which brings the whole New Testament under eschatological skies.

When the disciples asked Jesus, "Dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus answered, "It is not for you to know times and seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority. But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:7, 8). By these words Jesus did not mean that the disciples may know nothing about times and seasons. He himself had given them signs of the times. Jesus had also rebuked the Pharisees for being unable to read the signs of the times. Jesus only denies them the kind of calendar dates which they desire. And our Lord did indeed give them a sign, a *proper* sign of the times and seasons: ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses. Pentecost is the sign. And the continued presence of the Spirit of Pentecost in the Church, as the ground of her continued existence in spite of all opposition, and as the power by which she continues to bear witness to all nations through all ages, is the Sign of the End, of the Endless, and of the reality of both!

And to what does this Church constituted by the indwelling Spirit bear witness? To the Cross and the Resurrection; to the Cross as the End of the reigning power of sin and death, and to the Resurrection as that unendable power which makes all things new.

In Matthew 24:14 Jesus informs us that when the gospel is preached to all nations "then cometh the end." This conjunction between the completion of the task of preaching the gospel, and the fact that the end comes when it is completed, is not a merely mechanical conjunction. The relationship is rather a natural one; theologically speaking, it is an organic relationship. There is an inner organic relation between the

completion of the task and the point in time when the world ends. This becomes apparent if we remember that the movement of the gospel out of its Jewish confines and its proclamation to all the nations as a witness to the Cross as the End, *is itself a sign of the End*. When the witness of the End as it exists in the Cross is completed, it is most natural that "then cometh the end." Since the purpose of history is revealed in the Cross and Resurrection, it is only natural that when this revelation is revealed through witness to all nations that history should then be terminated and the world come to its end!

The fact that the Spirit is poured out in the "last days," that the Church is constituted by the indwelling Spirit in the last days to be a witness of the Cross as the End and of the Resurrection as the Endless, and finally the fact that upon the completion of this witness to all nations the end comes — all these are mutually interrelated facts, and their interrelatedness consists in their mutual relatedness to the End.

Unless we pay attention to the realized core of eschatology given at the time of the first coming of Christ, we shall never be able to regain this eschatological understanding of the

Cross, of the Resurrection, of Pentecost, and of the Church whose very nature consists in the preaching of the gospel; nor shall we be able to bring these insights into our doctrines of the Holy Spirit and Eschatology for their mutual enrichment.

The very existence of the Church in its Pentecostal structure, and the very witness of the Church to the gospel, is throughout the whole New Testament dispensation the chief sign of the End and of its nearness, a sign which continuously indicates that the Head of the Church is indeed the Lord!

Meaninglessness and the Book of Ecclesiastes

By HARRY R. BOER

FEW people imagined thirty years ago that the mid-century mark would find religion one of the absorbing topics of public discussion and political controversy in America. In those days religious leaders were very happy and took no pains to hide their joy when a scientist managed to find a place for God in the universe. Confidence in education as the remedy of our ills was relatively undisturbed. The doctrine of the brotherhood of man somehow required the religious corollary of the fatherhood of God but brotherhood was the important thing. And what commanding officer of a marine regiment would have had the temerity to insist on a chaplain for his outfit?

But now the situation bears a different face. A major subject of public controversy is the Church-State question. It finds its most acute expression not in the Vatican envoy matter but, of all things, in the question of the place of religion in the public schools. Political conventions are very incomplete without ample references to things religious. Religious books are written and read as never before. There are even references to the "demonic" in life. And, in this year of our Lord, 1952, marines — the indomitable boys who do the difficult immediately, the impossible takes a little longer — feel that an outfit is incomplete without a chaplain and they're saying it.

What has happened? Has America returned to God? Is there a new ac-

knowledge of God and of His Christ, a new appreciation of His Word? Or is this upsurge in religious interest the evidence of an abysmally deep alienation of man from the source of his life and of a painful groping to make sense of our hopelessly irrational world?

The Problem of Meaninglessness

IT has been said that the central religious problem of our day is the problem of the meaninglessness of existence. There is undoubtedly large truth in this thesis. The happy optimistic days of pre-World War I are gone. The convulsions of that catastrophe continued to be felt as false prosperity was followed by starkly real depression and this by a war of even vaster proportions and larger involvements. In its wake social, economic and political dislocations continue to perpetuate a universal instability. But overarching all is the dreaded realization that man has become the victim of the science of which he boasted and in which he had thought to find the key to happiness itself. He cannot put out of his mind the proven terrors of the atomic bomb and the known but as yet unexperienced terrors of the hydrogen bomb. He remembers the concentration camps, the pogroms against the Jews. Did *men* do this? It is here that reference is usually made to the "demonic."

When all this is faced seriously men ask the question — Is there still mean-

ing to life, is there purpose, sense, direction in the life of twentieth century man? Or is it all a horribly ironic meaninglessness? Especially parents who have brought up children to the threshold of service in life ask this question as they see them depart for service in the military forces.

If such is increasingly the mood in America one can imagine what it is in Europe. In matters like these America is always at least twenty years behind its mother countries. We are still a young country. We have seen no war in our land for nearly a century and then it was a quarrel between brothers. Europe is much more sophisticated and cynical than we. They envy our wealth but they smile at our naivete. Nowhere is the meaninglessness of existence a greater problem than in that area where human life has found its richest expression. Existentialism was born in Europe.

Some Christians, especially we ministers I guess, have an easy answer to the question of life's meaninglessness. If only these people would become Christians — so goes the answer — they wouldn't have such problems. They would know that God reigns, that there will be wars and rumors of wars, that the love of many will wax cold, that in the end God will establish a new world order in which justice will prevail, etc. There's something of the cliché in these easy responses to a tragic question. But clichés in the death chamber are fearfully cold things.

Meaninglessness, and Ecclesiastes — Continued

Meaninglessness and the Bible

THE fact of the matter is that Christians are also acquainted with the problem of the meaninglessness of existence. Christians especially are acquainted with it because they see injustice on the earth and confess to a just God in heaven. It is for this reason that the Bible takes the meaninglessness of life so seriously. It acknowledges that believers have a problem here and it deals with it. And what the Bible takes seriously *we* ought to take seriously. We may not make the ready answer which is always an unfeeling, a repulsive answer because the Bible does not do so.

When Pharaoh came to pay his respects to the aged father of his viceroy and asked him the number of his years Jacob replied, The days of the years of my pilgrimage have been one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of my life been. Moses said sadly, The days of our years are three score years and ten, and if by reason of strength four score years yet is their excellence but labor and sorrow. Job found himself surrounded by friends who had all the answers but he plaintively asked, Why died I not from the womb . . . wherefore is light given to him that is in misery and life to the bitter in soul? And the pain of children taken away in death: A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted . . . because they were not.

The problem of futility and frustration in the life of the unbelieving world can only be met when we recognize that the Scriptures have a serious word to speak here. We know in the midst of any contact with the irrational that it is that only as a passing experience, that the meaningless has a meaning in it that we cannot see. "The clouds ye so much dread are filled with mercy. . . ." But he who stands outside of Christ has not this assurance however much he may speak about the cloud with the silver lining. He is simply and only afflicted, tossed with tempest, not comforted. He can only be helped by one who knows that meaninglessness is a deep factor in life and what the answer to it is. For this reason the book of Ecclesiastes is so meaningful and comforting, so full of

instruction and help for the men of 1952.

Ecclesiastes and the Vanity of Life

IT is not the disillusioned and frustrated Westerner who first grappled with the meaninglessness of existence. The Existentialist has not presented a new thing. It is as old as the problem of evil itself. It is as old as the irrationalism of sin. And nowhere does it find such classic expression as in the words of Solomon: Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity. *All is vanity.* One cannot picture things more darkly than that. Here there is not even the silver lining.

It would be quite erroneous to conceive of the Book of Ecclesiastes as a pessimistic book. The doctor who correctly diagnoses an illness as cancer is not being pessimistic, he is realistic and truthful. The Heidelberg Catechism is not pessimistic when it precedes a discussion of salvation with an analysis of our misery. Solomon was not a man who had no eye for the bright side of life. He looked at the bright side and found that it was dark. His basic evaluation of life as it is lived apart from God is that it is vain, meaningless and hopeless. But there is another life also: "For God giveth to the man that is good in his sight wisdom, knowledge and joy" (2:26). The contrast between the vanity and the worth of life and the reason for it constitute the beauty of Ecclesiastes and its comfort for our day.

When Solomon concluded that all is vanity he expressed the result of a process of profound observation and experience. He had observed the life of nature and had found in it neither purpose nor direction, only monotonous sameness and cyclical regularity. The sun rises and sets, the wind returns again according to his circuits, all the rivers run into the sea and to the place from which they come they return again. The life of nature gets nowhere, it just goes round and round. And so it is with the life of man. One generation passes away and another generation comes. All things are full of labor, what has been is that which shall be, and there is no new thing under the sun.

Solomon was not content to make conclusions merely from observation. With an abandon that brooked no bar-

riers he threw himself into the life of men. He identified himself with highest pleasure and entered upon all-embracing activity. He built great works, he planted vineyards and gardens and orchards, he gathered silver and gold and the treasure of the provinces, singers and musical instruments entertained him, he gave himself to wine and to lay hold on folly. "And whatsoever mine eye desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy."

All this experience of success and pleasure led to a disillusionment as great as his abandon. He found no profit under the sun. The wise man and the fool both die and there is no remembrance of the wise man more than of the fool. Moreover, the result of his work he would have to leave to the man who would come after him, and he who knew whether he would be a wise man or a fool? So Solomon hated life because the work that is wrought under the sun was grievous to him. It was all vanity and vexation of spirit.

His frustration was heightened by noting the inexorableness of times and seasons to which mankind is subjected and over which it has no control. There is a time to be born and a time to die, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time of war and a time of peace. This is part of the meaninglessness of life. And the harshness of impersonal law is accompanied by man's disregard for human law and charity in the places that have been established to uphold them. He saw under the sun the place of judgment that wickedness was there and the place of righteousness that iniquity was there. He beheld the tears of those that were oppressed and they had no comforter, but on the side of their oppressors there was power. So Solomon praised the dead as more favored than the living, and he who had not yet been as better than both.

This catalogue of human frustrations culled from a few chapters in the book could be almost indefinitely extended. Small wonder that undiscerning pessimists find here the warrant for their philosophy of life.

"Under the Sun"

THERE is in all that Solomon writes a tell-tale expression that qualifies everything he says. It is "under the sun" or "under heaven." This is not just a manner of speaking or a poetic device. It is, if I may so put it, a

philosophic device. It is a means of picturing the limits beyond which the meaningless and the vain do not extend and within which everything is meaningless and vain. In the first two chapters the expression occurs no less than eleven times. Thereafter, with the pattern established it occurs regularly but less often. The life that is vain and irrational is the life that is lived merely "under the sun." It is the life that does not reckon with God who is, so to say, beyond the sun. It is the purely secular life that is pursued in alienation from its Maker and Redeemer. The biggest factor in our environment is God. He alone gives meaning to life and to history. The ignoring of the Creator by the creature is the affirmation of a self-destroying self-sufficiency. Therefore all wisdom that is merely secular brings nothing but grief, and the increase of merely secular knowledge serves but to increase sorrow.

This word "secular" is an interesting and helpful word. We speak of our secular society, of secular education, of the secularized West. The word is derived from the Latin *saeculum* meaning generation, age, the spirit or fashion of an age. It therefore suggests the very idea proposed by Solomon's "under the sun." It is rather amazing that a society whose major problem is the meaninglessness of existence should so glibly and uncritically describe its own essential character and lay bare the reason for its plight. For Western man has forsaken God, lives the life of the *saeculum*, sees and reckons with nothing other than what is "under the sun." He forgets or repudiates that God alone can give meaning and worth to life and effort and therefore is unable to appreciate the word of Paul that our labor is not in vain *in the Lord*.

Religion "Under the Sun"

WHEN we evaluate the contemporary return to religion we must therefore ask whether it is taking place "in the Lord." The upsurge in religious interest is by no means necessarily a hopeful sign in the midst of the awareness of meaninglessness. For there is also religion "under the sun," religion that partakes fully of the meaninglessness of life and is indeed the profoundest expression of it. The bondage and cruelty into which pagan religions cast

their adherents is evidence enough of the power of religion to pervert the true end of man's religious being. There is no efficacy in religion as such. There may be terrible catastrophe in it. The question is not, Is a man religious? The question is, Is a man good in the sight of God and therefore receives the true wisdom, knowledge and joy which triumph over all of life's irrationalisms. For God is not mocked, and especially will he not be mocked in man's religious relationship to him. It is particularly in the sphere of religion that he who is not for Him is against Him and who gathereth not with Him scattereth.

What is so much of the contemporary emphasis on religion but a further and desperate descent into the irrational? Western secular man thought that he had matters pretty well under control. In the social and physical sciences he saw the basis for a happy society and the abundant life. Then came the collapse, the more complete because it stretched over more than a quarter century. What is left now to build on? The process that began at the Renaissance (to take a point) has run its course and proved bankrupt. The despair attending the sub-conscious realization that a catastrophe has occurred drives men back to a primitive urge that had been so long suppressed. This is now finding uncritical expression in the "return to religion." It is a "leap in the dark" in the forlorn hope that some unknown divine arm will catch the venturer.

Is the Church able to speak to an age in such a mood?

The subtle temptation to which the Church and all Christians stand exposed is that because their religion is derived from divine revelation they will thereby consider it guaranteed against the curse of being exercised "under the sun." So thought Hophni and Phinehas when they made a fetish of the ark. And they who trusted in lying words saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these. The fact is that in the New Testament period as in the Old the most perverse expressions of religion are those that carry the name and the banner of the God of Scripture. The Church may never forget that *she* crucified the Lord of glory. The horribleness of pharisaism is that in the name of God it crucified the Son of God. For this reason the

New Testament pays so much attention to the pharisees. They were not merely a certain class of Jewish religious leaders. That is the least of their significance in the New Testament. They are a religious *type* found in all religions, but in its most monstrous form in the Church of the living God. Because they stand so close to God and know His word and will so well their rejection of Him places them at the outermost rim of alienation from Him and therefore in the center of His wrath. Membership and especially leadership in the Church of Christ does not excuse us from the most searching self-scrutiny. It is easy to crucify Christ afresh in the name of His Father, and the history of the Church from the earliest day to the present is replete with miniature repetitions of Golgotha. Therefore judgment shall begin at the house of God.

The Conquest of Meaninglessness

THE conquest of meaninglessness is revealed in the incarnation, the cross and the resurrection of our Lord. The fact that "under the sun" all is vanity means that "under the sun" is no redemption. Corruption cannot inherit incorruption. There must be an invasion from the outside. This invasion is the incarnation and the Invader is the God-Man. It is the mystery of redemption that God, in whom alone is the meaning of things, came "under the sun" in the person of His Son made man and, fully identifying himself with the vanity and meaninglessness of life, overcame them. Christ was made sin for us. The Logos, the Word, the Reason behind the universe came into the world whose essence is meaninglessness and humbled Himself under its contradiction. The Light shone in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not. He came unto His own and His own received Him not. The Prince of Glory became a servant and the Lord of all a man cast out by heaven and earth. And in this final being put to nought He suffered the ultimate of irrationalism and meaninglessness when in the hell-pain of the cross He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

To that extreme point which is not a point, for the infinity of our Lord's suffering had no limit, the meaninglessness of existence had to go before it

Meaninglessness, and Ecclesiastes — Continued

could be overcome. Only God could overcome it and He overcame it by suffering His Son to undergo it. Christ forsaken by God and crucified by the Church — that is the measure of meaninglessness of existence “under the sun.”

But as the darkness is greatest before the dawn so meaninglessness found its somberest manifestation just before its conquest. It is the glory of the cross

that Satan having done his utmost found his head crushed in the effort. Christ absorbed the meaninglessness of forsakenness and death and then cast it from Him in the power and glory of the resurrection. For the resurrection does away with death and all the irrational power of sin that causes death. The Cross, as Dr. Daane has been pointing out in his articles on Eschatology, is the End of the reign of sin, and

the resurrection the beginning of the Endless life in Christ. At the cross the meaninglessness of existence comes to an end, and at the resurrection the meaningfulness of a new life is born. Therefore we are now in Christ a new creature, old things are passed away, behold all things are become new. And to the new man in Christ who alone is good in the sight of God are given the incorruptible treasures of the wisdom, knowledge and joy which impart meaning and worth to life.

LETTERS TO THE JOURNAL

Inter-Church Principles?

Editors:

For the last couple of years I have been following your discussions *re* the NAE and ecumenicity with a great deal of interest, and also with a measure of sympathy for your position. I also thoroughly enjoyed the discussion on this matter which took place at last year's Synod.

But in all the discussion there is one thing which is very disconcerting to me. This is the negligible attention which has been given to the four principles drawn up by the study committee of 1949 and reported to the Synod of 1950. You have called my attention to them again in your last article in the *Reformed Journal* (June 1952). If my memory serves me correctly, the question of these principles was brought up on the floor of Synod last year, but they were dismissed with the remark that they are so self-evident that they do not need a long period of study for acceptance, and that surely no one could have any objections to them. But it is precisely with these principles that I have a great deal of difficulty.

My chief objection to them is that they do not make clear of what aspect of the Church they speak. Presumably the mandate of the Committee was to study “the whole question of inter-church relations and to formulate the principles by which the Church must be guided in determining the matter of inter-church affiliation.” But this could only have reference to the Church as an *institute*, since it is a contradiction in terms to speak of “inter-church” relations with reference to the Church as an *organism*. In its latter aspect the Church is and always shall remain

one and there is no other “church” with which it can enter into relations. That is why individual believers always and everywhere should, and in a measure do, cooperate with other individual believers, of whatever ecclesiastical stamp, in things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

And yet, when I read the four principles drawn up by the Synodical Study Committee, I cannot escape the conviction that they have drawn up principles which can have reference only to individual believers, and that they completely ignore the peculiar nature of the instituted church. What does it mean that “it is our duty to cooperate in spiritual matters with fellow-believers?” To whom does “our” have reference? Apparently to individual Christians. What is meant by “spiritual matters?” The lines are as indefinite as the horizon on a foggy morning. And what is meant by “fellow-believers?” Again it apparently has reference to individual Christians. And this second principle is but illustrative of all the others.

Why are these principles so self-evident? Because they but set forth the principles which should guide the individual Christian in his relations with other individual Christians within the organism of the one Church — principles which all true individual Christians have been practicing in a greater or less degree from the time of the birth of the Church.

But the Committee was mandated to set forth the principles which should guide the Christian Reformed Church in its inter-church relations, i.e., the Christian Reformed Church as an insti-

tuted Church in its relations with other *instituted* churches.

This points already to the first principle which should have been posited — namely, that the instituted Church has the right to enter into *ecumenical* relations only with *instituted* churches. It seems that this hardly needs argument in Reformed circles where it has always been assumed that individual congregations have the right to band together only with other organized congregations where the offices of Christ are present. This one thing alone, it seems to me, is reason enough why we cannot re-enter the NAE.

A second principle, it seems, is that the instituted church has the right to enter into ecumenical relations with other instituted churches only for the purpose of cooperating with them in the performance of those tasks which have been assigned by Christ to the instituted Church. And it seems that this also should need no argument in Reformed circles, where it has long been understood that the instituted church has a very peculiar area of activity. We have not even recognized the right of the instituted church to enter into official relations with our school societies to cooperate with them in “spiritual matters.” What right, then, does the Christian Reformed Church have to enter into a society which studiously, and that at the insistence of the Christian Reformed Church, refrains from doing that which is assigned to the instituted Church, and busies itself with matters social, political, and economic? Where it is insisted that the instituted Church has no right to busy herself in social, economic, and political affairs as such, it is a mere subterfuge to maintain that the instituted Church has the right

to join officially with a society which does concern itself with those areas of life. When that society then speaks out on social, economic, and political issues, the *instituted* church is speaking through it.

And finally, a third principle is the following — if the instituted Church has the right to join herself only with instituted churches, and if she has the right to do so only for the purpose of performing the tasks which are peculiar to the instituted church, then she has the right to join herself with those other instituted churches only on the basis of a confession of faith which includes all the “essentials.”

I realize that it is presumptuous on my part to say so, but I am convinced that the above three principles should replace the principles formulated by the Synodical Committee. These principles address themselves to the specific problem which faces our Church today in the area of ecumenicity. They take cognizance of the fact that there is a distinction between the Church as an organism and the Church as an institute. They clearly define the area of activity in which an ecumenical organization is to operate. And they are true to the Reformed conception of the Church.

It will probably be objected that this would result in a sort of super-denomination. That is not true, however. It would do so no more than our ecumenical relations with other Reformed Churches have done so. And to say that this would confine the area of activity so rigorously that the effort toward ecumenicity would hardly be warranted is to be without vision and is to depreciate the importance of the task which has been laid upon the instituted church.

John Stek, Oskaloosa, Iowa

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Dear Mr. Editor,

I must once again request some space in your paper to comment on the article of Dr. George Stob in the July, 1952 issue of the *Reformed Journal*, captioned “The Heart Of The Matter,” which was written in answer to my letter appearing in the same paper and as a reply to my editorial in the July, 1952 issue of the *Christian Labor Herald*.

Mr. Stob is perturbed by my accusation of misrepresentation and distortion of the truth, which was occasioned by his omission of the qualifying statement concerning “neutral” unions from a quotation of a Synodical decision of 1946. He now claims that it never occurred to him that to include that part of the decision was necessary because that definition of “neutral unions” has become as current as the word itself.

That explanation I could almost call naive. If Dr. Stob came into daily contact with working people as I do he would know that the conditions set forth by Synod upon which a so-called neutral union can be declared to be one with which a Christian may affiliate, are generally not known at all, or if known are conveniently overlooked. The common impression among our people is that the Church has approved of membership in “neutral” unions and that therefore membership in such organizations as the A.F.L. and C.I.O. is automatically permissible, no questions asked.

Dr. Stob, of course, strengthens them in that notion when he says: “The real question in connection with labor affiliation is not how to define the word ‘neutral.’ The real question is: Which are the ‘so-called neutral labor unions’ that Synod had in mind when it said that membership in them is compatible with church-membership? The answer is perfectly clear. Synod had in mind such ‘so-called neutral labor unions’ as the A.F.L. and the C.I.O.”

Now Dr. Stob may take it ill of me if I accuse him of misrepresentation, but, really, I know no other word for it. He simply has not the right to say that Synod had the A.F.L. and C.I.O. in mind when it said that membership in a neutral union, so-called, is compatible with church-membership. Especially not when the clear implication is that Synod — as Dr. Stob reads its mind — actually said that these organizations meet the conditions set forth by the Church, and that therefore membership in them is approved, has the blessing of the Church.

That is not true. Synod did not say anything of the kind. That is not the proper interpretation of the official position of the Church. I recall vividly that when the Committee which reported on this matter in 1946 had com-

pleted its report, the President, Dr. Clarence Bouma, at the last meeting, said: (freely translated from the Dutch J.G.) “And now I would like to know where there is such a neutral organization in our nation that meets those conditions, so that our people can freely join it. I don’t know of one.” Whereupon the secretary of the committee, Dr. William Hendriksen, replied: “I don’t either. But, of course, we are idealists here.” Neither could any other member of the committee name one so-called neutral organization that could qualify. These men represented the consensus of opinion in the Church.

It is true that Synods have been reluctant to state definitely that membership in any particular organization is not compatible with membership in the Church of Christ. That was a matter of policy. Next to the question of the propriety of doing so was the consideration that local affiliates of national organizations vary greatly from one place to another, and the practical difficulty of investigating the thousands of local unions to determine whether or not they met the required qualifications.

However, it is entirely wrong to give the impression, as Dr. Stob does, that because Synod did not *condemn* membership in such organizations it *approved* such membership. Synod did not say that, nor did it have that in mind. It included the A.F.L. and C.I.O. among numerous other “neutral” labor unions, all of which were subject to the conditions set forth, and instructed the consistories and Classes to investigate such organizations locally, to determine whether they met the required qualifications.

Sad to say, the consistories and Classes did not carry out these instructions. That is why, today, we have that terrible condition which Dr. Stob points to as proof of the rightness of his standpoint: namely that “our Church knowingly embraces in her membership and in her consistories members of the A.F.L. and C.I.O., without prejudice to their status as church-members or office-bearers.”

What a tragedy! What a mockery of the holiness of the offices in the Church! That men should be allowed to be members not only but even officers in the Church of Christ and at the same time hold membership in organizations that desecrate the Sabbath, that oppress conscientious Christians who refuse to join them, that refuse to be bound by

Letters to the Journal — Continued

the Word of God, that engage in practices wholly in conflict with that Word!

Is that judgment too strong? Listen to what Dr. George Stob said in a Back to God Hour radio sermon delivered on Sunday, August 31, 1947: "For its frequent resort to violence that results in the destruction not only of property but of life and the shedding of blood, labor stands roundly condemned. Nor can a better judgment be expressed for practices by which men are limited in their will and desire to work. In that respect labor has constituted itself a monopoly as sinister as the worst industrial combinations, and enslaves to its will many workers who are given the choice either to yield or to be kicked and mauled and dispossessed. There is no reason to justify the iron fist that forges a mass will, any more than there was reason to bless the German Gestapo. The Christian laborer can certainly have no part with those who trample upon the sacred rights they presume to defend, who practice inhumanity while they cry for humanity, who flout the justice of God and bend to the injustices of Mammon."

I have never said it quite that emphatically, but I agree.

How, then, in view of his own statements, can Dr. Stob defend such a condition in the Church? One would think, that knowing the godlessness of such organizations as he does he would rise up in wrath against the toleration of membership in them.

As to the condition itself, let's be honest, shall we? Isn't that condition being condoned simply because of the "bread and butter" question? Because the "neutral" unions indeed exercise such power as Dr. Stob so roundly condemned; can and do deprive men of their means of making a living, and that because of that evil power consistories have not the courage to demand separation from such unions? Unofficially that is freely admitted by leaders everywhere.

It is our refusal to pay the high cost of loyalty to Christ, individually and as a Church, that has brought us to the present sad state of affairs. That has bearing also on the denominational labor policy which led to this discussion.

The way out has been indicated by Dr. Stob in the concluding sections of his article, where he points to the ultimate choice each one of us must make: *for or against Christ*. He who tries

to be both: *for Christ* (in the Church) and *against Christ* (in a Godless union), is only fooling himself.

May God have mercy on our Church, and give us leaders who will bring it back to wholehearted, undivided service of the King! That is our only hope!

Joseph Gritter

In Reply

Most of what Mr. Gritter here writes is self-evidently answered by what I have written previously in the *Journal*. I do not count it profitable to say it again. I will venture only these observations:

1. Mr. Gritter is of the conviction that a Christian may not belong to the AFL or CIO. On that score he stands in disagreement with the Church, which has refused to condemn such membership, leaves it to the conscience of those concerned, and honors those so affiliated as members and office-bearers within her communion. Mr. Gritter's charge that the Church is violating her own conscience and making concessions to evil out of consideration for "bread and butter" and for want of courage on the part of her consistories, is neither warranted nor worthy. We have no reason to doubt, until there is plain contrary evidence, that the Church and her membership as a whole are acting in good conscience in the face of a difficult problem, and that our consistories do not demand separation, not because they are without courage, but because they are not persuaded that it is a proper demand.

2. Mr. Gritter's quotation from my radio sermon of August 31, 1947 would have been relevant in 1947. It is not so in 1952. There are some things in that statement by which I still stand. But on the whole I do not think it is a good statement. It is not quite objective nor a discerning analysis of the labor problem. I do not choose to stand by it today as an adequate or effective statement.

That is even more true of the context in which that statement appears. In the same radio sermon I took the position that labor had no right to strike, and that any attempt by labor to secure any end by work-stoppage was virtually a "striking against the government of the Almighty." I do not hold that position today, and I am sorry for having made labor the scape-goat for economic evils for which other seg-

ments of our society bear so large a share of responsibility.

3. Christians live perforce in an evil world. They must also often perforce work within the membership of social and economic organizations which are not Christian, and which sometimes engage in un-Christian practices. For those who would live godly in this present evil world and the organizations through which much of its life is carried on, this means struggle and the anguish of difficult conflict. Has the Church a word of counsel and guidance to give them in their endeavor, something of her sympathetic high-priestliness to give forth help, something of her spiritual powers to sustain? Or does the Church have only a bald ultimatum — separate or deny Christ?

The problem of the Christian's relation to this world and its institutions is not as easy of resolution as some seem to suppose. It may seem very simple to say to a Christian laborer who lives in Grand Rapids that he should become a member of the CLAU. What does one say to the Christian laborer who lives in Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Seattle? What does one say to the Christian laborer in Grand Rapids, who, with a social conscience under the governance of Christ and His Word, is persuaded that he may and ought to belong to a "neutral" union? Is it really the counsel of God to say to those of His children who are members of "neutral" organizations that they are against Christ, the eaters of Egypt's flesh-pots, cowardly souls?

We are not living in an abstract world where absolutes may be spoken and consented to with ease. We are living in a real world, complex with the problematic, where escape is not easy nor necessarily counselled, and where the Christian is called to exercise loyalty to Christ while sharing the life and the task of a common humanity.

Let the Church counsel and help those who, in God's Providence, are made to carry on their task in the thick of the life of this evil world. And if the counsel of separation is possible for some, let us not too readily assume — without regard to the problem and the challenge of living realities — that it is mandatory or even advisable for all.

George Stob